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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the ratings students assigned to an evening undergraduate abnormal psychology class and their scores on objective personality tests and course examinations was investigated. Students (N=70) completed the MMPI and made global ratings of the course; these scores were correlated separately by sex with the T scores of 13 MMPI scales, with the combined scores of the two class examinations taken earlier in the course and with the score obtained by summing the scores of these two examinations and the final examination score. There was only one statistically significant correlation among the 30 calculated. Results suggest that neither personality characteristics nor examination grades appear to have affected course ratings. (Author)

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PERSONALITY AND EXAMINATION SCORE CORRELATES OF ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY COURSE RATINGS[1]

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Statement of the Problem

With student ratings of their courses being proposed as a way of evaluating course effectiveness and teacher merit, it becomes important to know if the personality characteristics of students significantly influence their judgments of their courses. While some characteristics might promote honesty and objectivity in ratings, others might result in distortions and defensive or hostile reactions. It might be presumed that such personality factors, if they do indeed influence ratings, would be distributed among class members in such a way as to produce a random or cancelling-out effect on mean ratings. It is also

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possible, however, that the personality characteristics of a class could result in the introduction of a one-sided bias into course ratings. One study (Tetenbaum, 1975), for example, showed a congruence between student needs (as assessed by Jackson's Personality Research Form) and ratings of vignettes of teacher types.

A survey of recent research on student ratings of instruction in postsecondary institutions (de Wolf, 1974) reveals many inconsistencies in the findings from the relatively few studies of the relationships between course or instructor ratings and personality or attitude variables of the student raters. The several studies also differ among themselves in rating methods, rating procedures, scores, and personality measures.

Another question relates to the fact that ratings are made at the end of a course and following, in most cases, grades received on examinations during the course: are students' ratings of a course influenced by the grades they have received in the course?

The study reported here investigates the relationship between the ratings students assigned to an evening undergraduate abnormal psychology class and their scores on an objective personality test and on their course examinations.

Subjects Used

Seventy undergraduate students who completed the methods described below are the focus of this study. The means and standard deviations for age are 24.27 and 5.70 for the men, and 25.45 and 8.08 for the women (age range 19-53 years). All were college students in the writer's undergraduate course in abnormal psychology, a half-year course meeting once a week, three hours per meeting.

Procedure

At the first meeting of the course, an orientation and preview session, the students were told that the evaluation of teaching is not yet a completely valid procedure and that the course instructor wanted to continue research on evaluation. The students were asked to fill in a demographic information card on which they listed their name, sex, age, and a random, seven-digit number selected by each of them. It was explained to them that the number would be the only identifying material to go on what they would be asked to do, that it would enable a matching of the students' course ratings and final grades with their scores on the research task, and that the cards would be destroyed after the data had been recorded so that

anonymity would be assured. They were also told that anyone who did not wish to participate in the study could turn in a blank card, and that the cards would not be looked at until after the completion of the course and the assignment of grades.

The students were then given MMPI booklets and answer sheets, were told that the MMPI is used in research in both normal and abnormal psychology, were asked to look it over so that they would be acquainted with it, and were told that if they wished to complete the MMPI it would be used in a research project related to teaching. They were told that the MMPIs would not be scored until after the completion of the course and that anyone who did not want to take the test could merely look it over for his own information and turn in an empty response sheet along with the test booklet. Those who consented to the study were asked to put their seven-digit identifying numbers on the answer sheets.

The course was taught mainly by lecture, supplemented by a textbook (Coleman, 1972), audictapes, videotapes, and movies. The size of the class precluded extensive discussion by class members, but some exchange between students and instructor did occur.

Three multiple-choice examinations were given during the half-year, each consisting of 50 items and each covering different material. One of the three exams was the final test.

At the last meeting of the course, the students were asked to make a global rating of the course by making a mark across a 100 millimeter line anchored at the left end with the statement "Worst course I ever took" and at the right end with the statement "Best course I ever took." (Course ratings were scored in millimeters measured from the "worst course" end of the line to the intersecting rating mark.) Students were asked to take everything about the course into account in rating the course, including lectures, instructor, exams, text, course content, and auxiliary aids. After the rating was completed, students were asked to write their random seven-digit identification numbers on the rating sheets. They were told that putting in the identification number was voluntary, that the scoring of the exams would be done by a teaching assistant, and that the course ratings would not be looked at until course grades had been turned in to the university.

The MMPI was completed by 101 students, approximately two-thirds of those present at the first session.

Eighty-seven students completed the course rating form at the last meeting of the course. Those who did not do the rating included a number who were absent from the last meeting (which was not as well attended as other meetings because it was just prior to final examination week), some students who had dropped from the course, and a few who preferred not to complete the rating form. Both course ratings and MMPIs, with identifying numbers, were available for 70 students, 70 percent of those who had taken the MMPI at the beginning of the course.

This study addresses itself to two main questions:

1. Are personality characteristics related to course ratings? For this question, the K-corrected T scores of the MMPI scales were correlated with the course ratings.

2. Is there a relationship between examination grades and course ratings? For this question, the sum of the scores on the first two examinations (the two taken up until the time of the course rating) and the sum of the scores over all three examinations were correlated with the course ratings.

Some additional relationships, described below, were also explored.

The number of subjects available for each analysis varied with the data called for in each question, and is listed in the Results section below. The male and female student data were evaluated separately because at least one study (Kennedy, 1972) found a relationship between course evaluations and sex.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and ranges for age, sum of the scores on the first two examinations (those scores known by the students at the time they rated the course; maximum score possible = 100), total examination score (the total number correct over the three examinations administered during the course; maximum score possible = 150), and course rating.

The Pearson product-moment correlations between course ratings and the MMPI scores are presented in Table 2. The only statistically significant (.05 level) correlation is that between course rating and the MMPI F scale of the women in the class ($r = 0.32$).

The data in Table 3 show no significant correlation between course ratings and examination scores for either men or women. When course ratings and total examination scores are each correlated with age, however, a significant (.01 level)

correlation of 0.45 emerges between the course ratings and the ages of the men.

Because some members of the class are not represented in these findings, those who took the MMPI were compared on available data with those who did not. There were no significant differences in age, examination scores, or course ratings between the two groups.

Discussion and Conclusions

Neither personality test scores nor examination grades predicted students' global ratings of this abnormal psychology class. The one significant correlation accounts for relatively little variance, and, at any rate, cannot be considered reliable in view of the number of other, nonsignificant correlations. The variabilities in course ratings, examination scores, and MMPI scores are large enough that they would not restrict the emergence of significant correlations between the variables if such relationships were, indeed, there.

An interesting relationship appears between the course ratings and the ages of the men, the correlation of 0.45 being significant beyond the .01 level. There is a tendency for the older men in the class to give higher ratings to the course.

This writer would prefer to think that the added experience and wisdom which comes with age leads to a more realistic rating of the course in the positive direction, but alternative explanations also exist.

It should be kept in mind that these findings come from students in one class, with one instructor, and that not all students in the class participated in the study (although those who did and those who did not were similar in age, examination scores, and course ratings, and although lack of participation was often a matter of circumstances rather than of volition). The use of a global rating leaves something to be desired. It should also be recognized that, should one wish to venture generalizations from these data, they would apply most directly to evening courses with the wide range of age and, perhaps, other factors which characterize evening classes.

With these cautions in mind, it can be said that the findings give some support to the notion that course ratings are little influenced by the personality characteristics of college students or by the grades they receive, and make it seem more likely that course ratings are a function mainly of teaching, text, and course content variables.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges, for

Age, Examination Scores, and Course Rating

	Male				Female			
	n	M	S.D.	Range	n	M	S.D.	Range
Age	60[1]	22.95	4.44	19-40	79	23.97	7.15	19-53
Exam. 1+2[2]	61	76.85	8.39	57-92	79	75.59	10.12	56-98
Total Exam. Score[3]	61	116.98	12.57	87-141	79	115.58	14.73	82-147
Course Rating[4]	37	73.81	18.24	11-99	50	78.62	18.58	33-100

[1]One male student did not give his age.

[2]Highest possible score is 100.

[3]Highest possible score is 150.

[4]Distance, in mm , from left end of 100 mm line, left end of which is labelled "Worst course I ever took" and right end labelled "Best course I ever took."

Table 2

Correlations of Course Ratings with K-corrected MMPI Scores

	Male (N=26)			Female (N=44)		
	M	S.D.	r	M	S.D.	r
Course Rating[1]	71.04	20.89		76.95	18.63	
MMPI[2]: L	47.50	5.57	-0.30	49.25	7.02	-0.12
F	54.92	6.69	-0.07	54.48	7.07	0.32*
K	54.46	9.35	-0.03	55.64	9.13	-0.03
Hs	53.04	7.09	-0.04	52.30	8.46	0.05
D	57.38	10.49	-0.13	54.00	9.37	0.13
Hy	59.15	8.13	0.24	55.52	8.28	0.23
Pd	57.11	11.02	-0.11	55.80	10.46	-0.04
Mf	67.65	9.44	0.22	45.64	9.90	-0.04
Pa	54.46	9.78	0.25	55.16	7.81	-0.02
Pt	57.12	9.42	0.06	55.55	7.32	0.04
Sc	58.54	11.22	0.23	57.41	6.62	0.00
Ma	59.46	12.36	0.19	58.48	11.34	-0.07
Si	50.08	8.92	-0.38	54.34	10.21	-0.07

[1]Distance, in mm , from left end of 100 mm line, left end of which is labelled "Worst course I ever took" and right end labelled "Best course I ever took."

[2]K-corrected T scores.

*$p < .05$.

Table 3

Correlations Among Course Rating, Examination Scores, and Age

	Male				Female			
	n	M	S.D.	r	n	M	S.D.	r
Course Rating[1]	37	73.81	18.24	0.0.	50	78.62	18.58	0.12
Exam. 1+2[2]		76.05	9.14			76.96	10.27	
Course Rating[1]	37	73.81	18.24	-0.06	50	78.62	18.58	0.14
Total Exam. Score[3]		116.57	14.45			117.76	14.98	
Course Rating[1]	36[4]	73.89	18.48	0.45**	50	78.62	18.58	0.06
Age		23.78	5.08			25.68	8.38	
Total Exam. Score[3]	60[4]	116.93	12.66	0.06	79	115.58	14.73	0.17
Age		22.95	4.44			23.97	7.15	

[1]Distance, in mm , from left end of 100 mm line, left end of which is labelled "Worst course I ever took" and right end labelled "Best course I ever took."

[2]Highest possible score is 100.

[3]Highest possible score is 150.

[4]One male student did not give his age.

** $p < .01$.